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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ARMED FORCES CHIEF NAMED

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a move lauded by senior military officers and commentators, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on April 15 named Lieutenant General Victor Ibrado as the next Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). He will replace General Alexander Yano, who will retire on June ¶13. Lt. Gen. Ibrado's selection over the more controversial Lt. Gen. Delfin Bangit, who served as the head of President Arroyo's Security Group and the military's intelligence service, lends credibility to statements by senior government officials that promotion to the upper echelons of the Philippine military would continue to be based on professional criteria, rather than politics. Amid speculation whether Ibrado's tenure might extend beyond the end of the Arroyo administration, some anti-Arroyo pundits suggested that President Arroyo would prefer a general loyal to her as AFP Chief as a means of decreasing her vulnerability to facing prosecution after she steps down as president. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo approved the designation of Lieutenant General Victor Ibrado as next Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines on April 15. He will replace the current Chief of Staff, General Alexander Yano, who will retire on June 13. Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilbert Teodoro announced the appointment of Ibrado, as well as the appointment of Lieutenant General Delfin Bangit as the next commander of the Philippine Army. Ibrado was a classmate of General Yano and Philippine National Police Chief Director General Jesus Verzosa in the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) class of 1976; Bangit was a 1978 PMA graduate.

NO REVOLVING DOOR

¶3. (U) Commenting on the appointment of Ibrado, Malacanang Palace emphasized that Ibrado's selection to succeed General Yano as Chief of Staff is not a return to the "revolving door" policy of the past, when appointments to the position were given to as many senior military officers as possible, resulting in shortened tours of duty. Malacanang also said the timing of the announcement was made to ensure both Ibrado and Yano could prepare for a smooth transition. General Ibrado thanked President Arroyo for selecting him to occupy such a "sensitive position," and said he would continue the military's current program to upgrade its capabilities and enhance its readiness. Ambassador called Ibrado to congratulate him on his appointment. Ibrado, who recently hosted Ambassador for coffee, said he was honored to be chosen and looked forward to continuing the good mil-mil

relations between our countries.

ASSUAGING UNHAPPY BRASS

14. (C) In the leadup to the announcement of Ibrado's appointment, there were reports of senior Philippine military officers voicing concern regarding the possible promotion of junior members of the Philippine military into high level positions over more senior PMA classmates. The designation of Ibrado, who is currently the Commanding General of the Philippine Army, appears to have assuaged such concerns. While there has been scattered speculation among senior officials that Ibrado might be extended beyond President Arroyo's term, anti-administration political observers have also suggested that President Arroyo would prefer to have a senior officer loyal to her as chief of the armed forces as a way of decreasing the chances that she might face prosecution after she ends her term as president.

15. (U) Prior to his present position as Commanding General of the Philippine Army, Ibrado was the commander of the Philippine Armed Forces Central Command. He has also served as Commanding General of the Philippine Army Special Operations Command, and Chief of Staff of the 3rd Infantry Division. Lt. Gen. Ibrado is a graduate of the Philippine military's Special Forces Operations Course, Ranger School, Airborne School, and the Infantry Officers Advanced Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. He is the recipient of the Philippine Legion of Honor (Degree of Commander), five Distinguished Service Stars, two Outstanding Achievement medals, and five

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Bronze Cross medals. Lt. Gen. Ibrado is married to Dolores Clarion-Ibrado and has three children. Ibrado is well-known to the Ambassador and Embassy staff. He is personable, out-going, and popular with the rank and file.

COMMENT

16. (C) President Arroyo's selection of Ibrado over Bangit for the AFP's top post bodes well for the future of the U.S.-Philippine military relationship. While Bangit has been controversial -- allegations suggest he handed out money to subordinates as armed forces intelligence chief -- Ibrado is a personable, engaging individual who clearly understands the importance of our bilateral military relationship. He is an advocate for human rights and the rule of law and has reinforced at all levels of the military the need to remain apolitical. A highly regarded general officer, Ibrado understands the importance of civil military operations and sees them as a key piece to sustaining peace and stability. As a graduate of the U.S. Army Infantry Officers Advanced Course in Georgia, Ibrado has significant familiarity with U.S. military forces and operations and is an avid promoter of continued training between our two armed forces. The Mission has thus far enjoyed an excellent relationship with him and all indications are that it will continue to do so.

KENNEY